

Shaddād ibn Aws narrated that the Prophet (peace be upon him) said:

- 1 The best formula for seeking forgiveness is to say: Oh God, You are my Lord. There is no deity other than You. You have created me and I am Your servant.
- 2 I honour my covenant with You and my promise to You as much as I can.
- 3 I seek refuge with You from the evil of what I have committed.
- 4 I acknowledge Your Grace and I confess to my sinful actions,
- 5 so forgive me. Only You forgive sinful actions.
- 6 He said: 'If a person says this during the day then dies before he gets to the evening, he is one of the people of Heaven; and if he says it at night and dies before he gets to the morning, he is one of the people of Heaven'.⁽¹⁾

1 Related by al-Bukhari, 6306.

From the Qur'an

- ﴿If, when they have wronged themselves, they would but come to you and pray to God to forgive them, and the Messenger prayed for their forgiveness, they would surely find that God is the one to accept repentance, ever-merciful.﴾ (7: 64)
- ﴿Said they: 'Our Lord! We have wronged ourselves; and unless You grant us forgiveness and bestow Your mercy upon us, we shall certainly be lost'.﴾ (7: 23)
- ﴿Hence, pray to your Lord to forgive you your sins, and then turn towards Him in repentance. My Lord is indeed ever-merciful and all-loving.﴾ (11: 90)
- ﴿I said: "Ask your Lord for forgiveness: He is ever-forgiving. (10) He will let loose the sky over you with abundance, (11) and will give you wealth and children; and will provide you with gardens and rivers".﴾ (71: 10-12)

The Narrator

The Prophet (peace be upon him) tells his community this formula of seeking God's forgiveness. It guarantees that a person who says it and dies believing in it shall be admitted into Heaven.

Summary

Abu Ya'lā Shaddād ibn Aws ibn Thābit ibn al-Mundhir of the Anṣār was a distinguished scholar among the Prophet's companions. He was one to whom God granted good knowledge and fine forbearance. He lived in the city of Homs in Syria, where 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb appointed him governor. When 'Uthmān ibn 'Affān was killed, he relinquished his post. He was very devoted and God-fearing. He died in Palestine in Year 58 AH 678 CE. He was 75 years of age.



Message and Meaning



1 There are many ways and forms of seeking God's forgiveness, and these are explained in the Qur'an and the Prophet's Sunnah. However, the best formula which is most effective and likely to be accepted is the one the Prophet describes as the master formula. This is the one starting with: 'Oh God, You are my Lord. There is no deity other than You. You have created me and I am Your servant'. Thus, a Muslim starts his appeal for forgiveness by acknowledging God's oneness. He is our Lord and Master who controls all our affairs. He has created us with His own hand, and none other than Him deserves to be worshipped. The Creator is unlike any other. He says: 'Is He who creates like one that cannot create? Will you not think?' (16: 17)



2 The supplicant then renews his covenant with God, stating that he continues to be committed to the covenant of belief in God which God accepted from all humans when they were still in their fathers' loins. God says: 'Your Lord brought forth their offspring from the loins of the children of Adam, and called them to bear witness about themselves. [He said]: "Am I not your Lord?" They replied: "Yes, indeed"'. (7: 172) What this means is that the supplicant declares his commitment to the pledge that he will obey his Lord and not disobey Him or associate partners with Him, as much as is within his ability. Any failing to acknowledge God's grace or any sin one may commit is due to human weakness. It is not the result of any ignorance of God's oneness and greatness. Thus, the supplicant states an implicit acknowledgement of falling short of the fulfilment of his duty towards God.



3 The supplicant then seeks refuge with his Lord from the evil he might have perpetrated, such as falling short of doing what is due to God, or expressing his gratitude for God's bounty. The only suitable thing in man's relation with God is to worship Him truly and purely. Whatever one does otherwise is something that requires God's forgiveness.



4 The supplicant also acknowledges God's countless favours and acknowledges his own sins, slip-ups and errors.



5 Having started his supplication with the praise of God and acknowledgement of His favours and bounty, as well as admitting his sins, the supplicant prays for God's forgiveness, stating clearly his knowledge that none forgives sins other than God.



6 The Prophet (peace be upon him) then explains the merit of this supplication, stating that if a person says it in the morning, fully convinced of it and with true sincerity then dies during that day, he will be in Heaven. The same applies if he says it in the evening and then dies before the next morning.

This formula is the best way of seeking God's forgiveness because it includes acknowledgement of God's oneness and His favours, and because the appeal for forgiveness is preceded by suitable praises of God.



Implementation

1

The best formula for seeking God's forgiveness is to start by saying 'Oh God, You are my Lord and I am Your servant'. This is to acknowledge by word and heart that God is one's Lord and Master, who controls everyone's affairs. It is also an acknowledgement that the supplicant is God's servant, in reality and in faith. In reality, it means that God does whatever He likes with His servant, causing him to be in health or illness, in wealth or poverty, in error or following right guidance, as His wisdom determines. He is also God's servant in faith, worshipping Him as He bids him, fulfilling His commandments and refraining from what He forbids.

2

It is important to start with praising God and glorifying Him before saying one's supplication. The Prophet (peace be upon him) overheard someone supplicating during prayer, but he did not start with praising God and offering the greeting of peace to God's Messenger. The Prophet said: 'The man is hasty'. He subsequently called him and said to him and others: 'When any of you prays, he should start by praising and thanking God, then offer the greeting to the Prophet, then he should supplicate as he wishes'.⁽¹⁾

3

The best way to seek God's forgiveness is to start by praising and glorifying God and to follow this with an acknowledgement of His favours and grace. One should then acknowledge one's own errors and that he falls short of what is required. One should then appeal for God's forgiveness.

4

Scholars, educators and advocates of Islam should explain to people the best phrases of glorification of God, the best supplications for forgiveness and the best phrases of greeting and thanking the Prophet (peace be upon him). They should teach people what they need to know and say of supplications and glorifications and the best times of saying them.

5

Everyone should state verbally and acknowledge mentally that he is faithful to his covenant with God, which requires him to obey God and hold on to believing in Him. He is committed to the fulfilment of this as well as he can. God does not require anyone to do more than he or she can.

6

Every Muslim should denounce his own sinful actions and seek God's refuge from them. The only fitting relationship with God for a Muslim is perfect obedience.

7

Every sinner should make sure not to exult in his sin or speak about it openly. God, the Exalted, will forgive every believer, except those who boast openly about their sins. The Prophet (peace be upon him) said: 'All my community are safe, except the boasters. One way of boasting is that a person may do something at night. He may start his day and God is shielding him. Yet, he will say: 'Listen, so-and-so! Last night I did such-and-such', when his Lord had kept it covered. Thus, his Lord is covering what he did at night, and he starts his day removing God's cover'.⁽²⁾

8

Acknowledging the blessings and favours God has granted requires the expression of gratitude. This means that man must not use such bounty in a sinful way.

1 Related by Ahmad, 23937.

2 Related by al-Bukhari, 6069; Muslim, 2990.

9

Admitting one's sin is the first step to repentance. It is important not to persist in denying one's sinful action. It is hoped that God will forgive the one who admits his sins.

10

It is important never to belittle one's sin. To do so motivates one to do more of the same. It certainly does not encourage a person to repent. Al-Fuḍayl ibn 'Iyāḍ said: 'The more lightly you think of your sin, the more serious it is in God's sight, and the more seriously you think of it, the less it is in God's sight'.

11

A believer thinks his sins very serious, even though they are minor. He will regret having done them and turn to God seeking His forgiveness. 'Abdullāh ibn Mas'ūd said: 'A believer thinks of his sins and sees himself sitting under a mountain which he fears to collapse over him. A persistent sinner sees his sins like a fly passing in front of his face, and he moves it away with his hand'.⁽¹⁾

12

No one forgives sins other than God, the Exalted. Turn to Him alone, seeking His forgiveness and praying for His mercy. Beware of appealing to dead people and seeking their help. They can do you no benefit.

13

When God wants something good to happen to someone, He opens for him the way of humility and encourages him to turn to Him, acknowledging his need for God's help. He will enable him to see his own faults and transgression, and to recognize God's grace, bounty, mercy and favours, so that he will be grateful and praise Him.

14

Everyone should make sure to memorize this supplication which the Prophet describes as the best formula of seeking forgiveness. It is recommended to say it every morning and evening so that one ensures to be in Heaven, should one die on that day.

15

Every Muslim should learn and repeat the supplications and glorifications highlighted by the Prophet for their special merit, such as the present one which guarantees admittance into Heaven.

16

Educators, scholars and advocates of Islam should explain to people the reward God grants for a recommended formula of supplication or glorification of God. This encourages the listener to repeat them often.

Addressing God, one Shariah scholar said:

My Lord, if my sins are very numerous, I know that Your forgiveness is much greater.

If only good people hope for Your mercy, to whom should a guilty one turn? I appeal to You sincerely, my Lord, as You have bidden me. If You turn me away, where can I find mercy?

I am turning to You pleading nothing other than my hope, Your generous forgiveness and that I am a Muslim.

1 Related by al-Bukhari, 6308.

